SN 2.6 — Kamada Sutta: Kamada's Lament

English translation by Andrew Olendzki.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: UNKNOWN. Entire protected source unit, including notes and verses, preserved; canonical completeness has not been independently established.

Text

[Kamada:]

So hard it is to do, Lord, It's so very hard to do!

[Buddha:]

But still they do what's hard to do, Who steady themselves with virtue. For one pursuing homelessness, Content arrives, and with it joy.

[Kamada:]

So hard it is to get, Lord, This content of which you speak!

[Buddha:]

But still they get what's hard to get, Who delight in a tranquil mind. The mind of those, both day and night, Delights in its development.

[Kamada:]

So hard it is to tame, Lord, This mind of which you speak!

[Buddha:]

But still they tame what's hard to tame, Who delight in senses at peace. Cutting through mortality's net, The nobles, Kamada, proceed.

[Kamada:]

So hard it is to go, Lord, On this path that gets so rough!

[Buddha:]

Still nobles, Kamada, proceed On paths both rough and hard to take. Those who are less than noble fall On their heads when the path gets rough. But for nobles the path is smooth — For nobles smooth out what is rough!

Translator's note

This plaintive cry of the deva Kamada, concerning the difficulty of Buddhist practice, will resonate with almost anyone who has embarked on the temporary homelessness of a retreat at IMS or elsewhere. The steady reply of the Buddha here admonishes Kamada to overcome his weaknesses and find the nobility within himself to tread the noble path.

The tone of this poem is so typical of the approach the Buddha displays throughout the Pali texts — compassionate yet firm, reasoned but profoundly inspiring. The progression is also characteristic — from virtue to joy, tranquillity to diligent development, and finally cutting through the snares of death and rebirth and proceeding to undying nibbana.

Kamada is reminded that others have done, gotten and tamed what he is having such difficulty doing, getting and taming. Others have taken the hard path to the goal, and all he lacks is the resolve, the hero's determination, to forge ahead despite the obstacles.

The lyrical almost sing-song quality of the verse has been hopefully retained by translating it in something like its original meter of eight syllables per line.